

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES AUTUMN · WINTER 2013

# Concerts at The University

Tuesday 5 November 2013

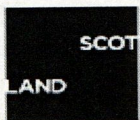
1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Jeremy Huw Williams · baritone

Ed Jones · piano

Programme of works by **POULENC**, **PAUL MEALOR** and  
**PETE STOLLERY**.



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH  
*Edinburgh College of Art*

## Le travail du peintre, song cycle for voice and piano, FP 161 (text by Paul Éluard)

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

1. Pablo Picasso
2. Marc Chagall
3. Georges Braque
4. Juan Gris
5. Paul Klee
6. Joan Miró
7. Jacques Villon

Francis Poulenc was one of the great writers of art songs of any era, and certainly of the twentieth century. This song cycle has his characteristic mixture of energy and lyricism, of hard 'modern' harmonies alternating with sweetness or tenderness.

In 1948 Poulenc thought of writing a song cycle on poems about painters in Paul Éluard's book *Voix*. Poulenc wanted a closing poem on Matisse so as to be able to end the cycle '...in joy and sunshine,' as he wrote in his invaluable *Journal de mes mélodies*. The poet's death in 1952 made that impossible. After concluding other work including his great opera *Dialogues of the Carmélites* Poulenc was finally able to write this cycle in tribute to Éluard. The songs are reactions more to the poems than to the painters or their pictures.

Pablo Picasso is hard-edged and dark, despite being in C major. Éluard's poem is about the process of painting, and Poulenc captures the implacable energy of the highly prolific Spaniard in regular, indomitable rhythms. Poulenc wrote that by 1956 C major '...no longer means peaceful happiness.'

Marc Chagall, on the other hand, was a painter Poulenc was less than enamoured with, and this song, as he aptly described it, is a 'rambling scherzo.' Its melody is rather sing-songish.

Poulenc said that Georges Braque was rather too mannered or tasteful, '...but that is how I feel Braque.' He somewhat underrates the song, in this writer's estimation, for it is gentle and lyrical, with a nice contrast capturing the poet's juxtaposition of Braque's bird paintings and tender human paintings.

Juan Gris is the masterpiece of the set. Poulenc sketched out ideas for it when he first thought of the cycle. Poulenc expresses pride that he accurately caught the poem's rhythms, but even more impressive is the way he enhances the poem's tenderness and affection.

Paul Klee is a weaker poem, and inspired a weaker song. Mostly, it fills the need, at this point in a cycle, for a presto movement. It '...must go like a bang,' Poulenc wrote.

But Joan Miró is a much better song, very difficult to interpret with its wide variety of mood and more changes of tempo than common in his or anyone's songs of this length.

Poulenc was almost as fond of Jacques Villon, the concluding song, as he was of Juan Gris. Initially, the song is like a proclamation, and seemingly rather heartless, but a litany-like passage toward the end inspired a very affecting moment of humanity. This passage also is the subject of detailed discussion in Bernac's book, which correctly (the writer thinks) tells other baritones how to achieve the '...sudden softness,...sudden wonder' inherent in these lines.

Note by Joseph Stevenson

## At Summer's End

Paul Mealar (b.1975)

Paul Mealar's *At Summer's End* (with poetry by Peter Davidson) consists of three narrative fragments about the painter Rex Whistler (1905-44) in the summer days of 1938, when he was finishing his great mural at Plas Newydd in Anglesey. The first working title for this cycle was 'Pre-War Songs', expressing their atmosphere of elegant melancholy as good days go into irrecoverable pastness as love fails, war approaches, and summer ends.

1) 'Rex Whistler to the Evening Star' is a song of longing (his love for his patron's beautiful daughter was not reciprocated) as though in moment alone snatched from a party, a moment of gazing into the darkening distances over the Menai Strait.

2) 'The Golden World' is the longest song, one of unshadowed joy in the present moment, celebrating the brilliant light of morning and Whistler's capacity to create a "golden world" outside time in his mural paintings.

3) 'Rex Whistler's Blues, August 1938' is a song of hopeless love and approaching war, as the painted room is finished and his love is rejected. It reflects on his self-portrait in a corner of the mural, his own sombre handsomeness transformed into the haunting figure of a hollow-eyed gardener sweeping up the fallen petals of the rose which his love has thrown away:

And the good days are fading like smoke and soon they'll be over —  
The swallows muster at the summer's close.  
My good days are smoke on the wind and soon they'll be done.

*At Summer's End* was commissioned in 2013 by Jeremy Huw Williams in association with the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust.

## Lost Princes

Pete Stollery (b.1960)

*Lost Princes* is a setting of words by the poet Peter Davidson, which celebrates two major figures in seventh and eighth century Welsh history – Cadfan (d. 625), ruler of Gwynedd and Eliseg (fl. mid 8<sup>th</sup> cent.), ruler of Powys.

One of the main themes is that of remoteness, both in time and in location. I wanted to emphasise these two aspects alongside imagery provided by references in the poem to water and stone. The digital sound part is made up, for the most part, from recordings made at the locations of two monuments dedicated to each figure – the Pillar of Eliseg near Llangollen and the Catamanus (Latin for Cadfan) Stone in Llangadwaladr, on the Isle of Anglesey.

*Catamanus, the wisest, most famous of Kings* is the clearly discernible text on the Catamanus Stone. The text on the Pillar of Eliseg, however, has now completely worn away. The historian Edward Llwyd made an inscription of the text in 1696, which was, even then, partly indecipherable and which was translated in Nash-Williams' *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* in 1950. These different aspects of remoteness from the original inscription provided a powerful stimulus for the piece and are reflected in the ambiguities provided by partly-recognisable sounds interweaving with recognisable ones which undergo gradual transformations.

Another challenge was to be mindful of the fact that performance would be within the context of an art song recital, alongside pieces for voice and piano, rather than alongside other pieces of electroacoustic music. The first sound is that of a piano middle C, which gradually transforms into a non-real world soundscape made up of sounds recorded on location; similarly, the piece ends with the decay from a single piano note. Sound files are triggered via computer by the accompanist, from the piano stool.

*Lost Princes* was commissioned by Jeremy Huw Williams, with funds from Creative Scotland.

The Welsh baritone **Jeremy Huw Williams** studied at St John's College, Cambridge, at the National Opera Studio, and with April Cantelo. He made his debut with Welsh National Opera as Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*) and has since appeared in sixty operatic roles. He has given performances at major venues in North and South America, Australia, Hong Kong, and most European countries.

In France he has sung the roles of Olivier (*Capriccio*), Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*), George (*Of Mice and Men*), Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Shchelkalov (*Boris Godunov*), Baritone (*Hydrogen Jukebox*) and title role *Till Eulenspiegel* by

Karetnikov for L'Opéra de Nantes, and Sebastian (*The Tempest*) for L'Opera du Rhin. In Italy he has sung the role of Nixon (*Nixon in China*) at the opera house in Verona and Ferryman (*Curlew River*) at the opera houses of Pisa and Trento. In Greece he has sung the role of Chou En-lai (*Nixon in China*) for Greek National Opera. In Belgium he has sung the role of Marcello (*La Bohème*) for Zomeropera. In Norway he has sung the role of Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) for Vest Norges Opera and Serezha (*The Electrification of the Soviet Union*) for Opera Vest. In Austria he has sung the role of Dr Pangloss (*Candide*) in Vienna, a role that he repeated in Bremen, Munich and London. In the USA he has sung the role of Lukash (*The Good Soldier Schweik*) for Long Beach Opera.

In Wales he has sung the roles of Guglielmo (*Così fan tutte*), Escamillo (*Carmen*), Germont (*La Traviata*), Marcello (*La Bohème*) and Le Dancaire (*Carmen*) for Welsh National Opera and the roles of Serezha (*The Electrification of the Soviet Union*), Tarquinius (*The Rape of Lucretia*), Choregos (*Punch and Judy*), Mangus (*The Knot Garden*) and Dr Simon Browne (*For You*) for Music Theatre Wales. In Ireland he has sung the role of Teddy (*The Silver Tassie*) for Opera Ireland. In Scotland he has sung the roles of Andrew (*74 Degrees North*), Father (*Zen Story*), Epstein (*The Letter*) and Kommerzienrat (*Intermezzo*) for Scottish Opera.

He has given recitals at the Wigmore Hall and Purcell Room, and at many major music festivals. He has appeared with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales in Tippett's *King Priam* at the Royal Festival Hall, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in Lambert's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* at Symphony Hall, the Hallé in Handel's *Messiah* at the Bridgewater Hall, the Philharmonia in Mozart's *Requiem* at St David's Hall, the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Nielsen's *Third Symphony* at the Royal Albert Hall during the BBC Proms, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in Rawsthorne's *Medieval Diptych*, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in Adams's *The Wound Dresser* at City Halls, the BBC Philharmonic in Schubert's *Mass in Ab*, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, the London Philharmonic Orchestra in Watson's *O! Captain*, the Ulster Orchestra in McDowall's *Theatre of Tango*, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in Mathias's *This Worlde's Joie* at the Three Choirs Festival, and the BBC Concert Orchestra in Stainer's *Crucifixion* at Southwark Cathedral for BBC Radio 2.

He has also appeared with the RTE Concert Orchestra in Dvořák's *Requiem* at the National Concert Hall in Dublin, the Orchestre National de Lyon in Benjamin's *Sometime Voices* at the Auditorium de Lyon, l'Orchestre Léonard de Vinci in Brahms's *Requiem* at the opera house in Rouen, the Orquestra Simfònica de Barcelona i Nacional de Catalunya in Orff's *Carmina Burana* at the Auditori in Barcelona, and the Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester in Bach's Christmas Oratorio. He is renowned as a fine exponent of contemporary music, having commissioned much new music and given premieres of works by Alun Hoddinott,

William Mathias, John Tavener, Michael Berkeley, Paul Mealor, Julian Phillips, Richard Causton, Mark Bowden, and Huw Watkins. He frequently records for BBC Radio 3 (in recital, and with the BBC NOW, CBSO, BBC SO, BBC SSO, BBC Philharmonic and BBC CO), and has made many commercial recordings, including eight solo discs of songs.

As a principal singer with Welsh National Opera he appeared at the opening night of the Wales Millennium Centre, and received the inaugural Sir Geraint Evans Award from the Welsh Music Guild, given annually to a person or persons who have made a significant contribution to Welsh music in any one year or recent years: 'there has been an unanimous decision that the first award should be made to baritone Jeremy Huw Williams in recognition of not only his performing ability but also for the tremendous support that he has given to Welsh composers and their music in recent years'.

He was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by Glyndwr University in 2009 for services to music in Wales, and received the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Music from the University of Aberdeen in 2011.

**Ed Jones** is an Aberdeen-based composer studying for a PhD at the University of Aberdeen under the supervision of Professor Paul Mealor and Dr Phillip Cooke. His research is in vocal music using various northern languages and texts. His works have been sung by choirs such as Con Anima Chamber Choir, The University of Aberdeen and Edinburgh Chamber Choirs, and have most recently been recorded with The St Andrews University Chapel Choir on its forthcoming CD.

He is Assistant Organist of St Andrew's Cathedral, Aberdeen, and is regularly involved with the accompanying of choirs such as the University Choral Society. As a conductor, Ed has worked with a wide variety of groups, from directing small choral consorts to having been the musical director and conductor of two fully staged operas.

Ed graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree with First Class Honours at the University of Aberdeen in 2011. During his time as an undergraduate, he was awarded the Ogston Prize in Music Making, the Chris Cadwur James Composition Award, and is the only music student to have been awarded the Aberdeen City Quincentenary Prize.

Alongside his musical activities, Ed is a keen traveller, enjoys Amerindian woodcarving and appreciates good rum.